IMPORTANCE OF GROUP LEARNING AND ITS APPROACHES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Group learning refers to a collection of persons who are emotionally, intellectually, and aesthetically engaged in solving problems, creating products, and making meaning—an assemblage in which each person learns autonomously and through the ways of learning of others. The current article depicts about introducing group learning, enlisting the key features of group learning, discussing the advantages of group learning, describing the general strategies to incorporate group work and how to evaluate the group work. This article also suggests different approaches by which the group learning could be done.

INTRODUCTION

There are two basics of learning; the first one is to learn by their own with the help of individual's understanding and knowledge and the second one is by learning in groups or by learning socially within the groups. Working in small groups provides learners with opportunities to articulate ideas and understandings, uncover assumptions and misconceptions, and negotiate with others to create products or reach consensus. Group activities enable students to discover deeper meaning in the content and improve thinking skills. The most effective use of group work is that which engages students with higher-level content that is thought-provoking, difficult to understand, or has multiple interpretations.

By group, we refer both to the learning of individuals that emphasizes by being in a group and to a more scattered kind of learning that does not reside inside the head of any one individual. Rather than focusing only on what the individual knows, the goal is to build a collective body of knowledge; learning groups strive to create publicly shared understandings.

By learning, we refer to the learning processes and outcomes involved in solving problems and creating products that are considered meaningful in a culture (Gardner, 1983). Rather than focusing on discrete bits of information that can be produced via simple-answer questions, this type of learning is situated in real-world problem solving and engages students cognitively, emotionally, and aesthetically.

An educational approach in which the work has to be carefully planned and frequently requires a facilitator to ensure the group progress is known as group learning. The function of the groups and the learning within the group needs to be assessed and evaluated. The material learned and understood is just as important as the group's ability to achieve a common goal. Facilitatory skills are important and require that the teacher to ensure that both the task is achieved and the functioning and the integrity are maintained.

Group learning encourages the students to develop various interpersonal, intrapersonal, presentational and communicational skills, all beneficial to life outside the classroom. These important skills are difficult to develop individually and require continuous feedback and interaction with the group members which is not possible if not taken the advantage of the group.

Some experts have criticized small group learning, especially that which consists of extremely small groups, for reducing learn-responsibilities and thereby reducing the motivation of the learner. When learning in a group, individuals can lose sight of their learning objectives and prioritize those they have common in others. In addition, they may be the subject to the free rider effect in groups that have a few highly skilled members.

FEATURES OF THE GROUP LEARNING

The members of the groups hold the following features:

- ✓ Learn and practice specific roles
- ✓ Learn to deal with complications and practice these skills
- ✓ Communicate clearly and directly with each other
- ✓ The members of the groups may include the children as well as the adults
- ✓ They focus on content and the process as well
- ✓ They work in collaboration so as to meet their goals of the group while simultaneously improving the personal relationships and the group progress.
- ✓ Documenting children's learning process helps to make learning visible by shaping it in its appropriate and desired format.
- ✓ The members of the learning groups are attached to each other by values such as aesthetic, emotional, psychological as well as social learning.
- ✓ The focuses of the learning in groups extends beyond individual learning and create a collaborative body and structure of knowledge.

ADVANTAGES OF GROUP LEARNING:

- ✓ Learners are encouraged to become active rather than passive learners by developing collaborative and co-operative skills, and lifelong learning skills.
- ✓ It enhances the development of critical thinking skills.
- ✓ It encourages student's learning and achievement.
- ✓ Learners have the opportunity to learn from and to teach each other.
- ✓ Depth rather than shallow approaches to learning are motivated
- ✓ It facilitates learner greater transfer of previous knowledge and learning
- ✓ Learner centred approach to teaching and learning, and assessment is focussed
- ✓ Learners are involved in their own learning.
- ✓ It enhances social skills and interactions.
- ✓ Outcomes of the learning are improved.
- ✓ Large numbers of learners can be catered for and work on task simultaneously.
- ✓ Interaction and co-operation on a micro scale is facilitated thus decreasing a sense of isolation felt by some.
- ✓ Learners who are introvert have an opportunity to speak and be heard in small groups thus overcoming the anonymity and passivity associated with large groups.
- ✓ Teaching, learning and assessment options are increased.
- ✓ Teaching effectiveness and efficiency increases, and as a result there is increased enjoyment of teaching by staff (and students).
- ✓ Learners get the chance to work on large projects (larger in scope or complexity than individual tasks).
- ✓ Learners from diverse backgrounds are provided with the opportunity to be heard, share experiences and skills, and to participate in unique ways (may provide a new perspective).

- ✓ It can save time and requires a shared workload.
- ✓ Alternative ideas and points of view can be generated.
- ✓ It provides a structured learning experience that can prepare students for the realities and diversity of the workplace, working with people with different skills, cultures, approaches and from different places.
- ✓ Learners develop and practice skills in: decision making, problem solving, values clarification, communication, critical thinking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and teamwork.

APPROACHES TO GROUP LEARNING

There are many teaching method s that are perfect for group learning. The choice entirely depends upon the teacher which method he or she like to use as a teaching techniques. There are various approaches to group learning such as:

1. Ice-Breakers Team Building approach

Icebreakers are an effective way to help students feel more comfortable in your classroom and to get to know one another better. They are fun and interactive sessions that are held at the beginning of the semester.

Icebreakers create a more relaxed environment and allow students to share ideas and participate more fully in the course. Students become more engaged in the classroom and so contribute more effectively towards a successful outcome.

Icebreakers also:

- Help establish rapport with students and encourage a more productive learning environment
- Help create a positive group atmosphere
- Energize and motivate

When choosing activities consider what you want to achieve with an icebreaker. Will you set the tone for your students or lead into course content in engaging ways? Icebreakers do not always go as planned. Flexibility and willingness to learn is part of building a positive and open learning community.

Brainstorming

Provide a cue, concept, question or idea in order to generate a list of responses, options and suggestions

2. SWOT analysis
   Use a grid with the headings STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES and THREATS to generate (brainstorm or map) ideas about a topic, question or issue. Used to identify and address aspects of the issue
3. Jigsaw Method
   The jigsaw classroom is a cooperative learning technique with a three decade track record of successfully reducing racial conflict and increasing positive educational outcomes. Just as in a jigsaw puzzle, each piece each student's part is essential for the completion and full understanding of the final product. If each student's part is essential, then each student is essential; and that is precisely what makes this strategy so effective.
   The jigsaw classroom method is simple to use. A teacher can easily follow these steps.
   - Divide students into 5-6 people's jigsaw groups. The groups should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, race and ability.

- Appoint one student from each group as the leader. Initially, this person should be the most student in the group
- Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments
- Assign each student to learn one segment, making sure students have direct access only to their own segment.
- Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.
- From temporary "expert groups" by having one student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.
- Bring the students back into their jigsaw groups
- Float from group to group, observing the process. If any group is having trouble, make appropriate intervention. Eventually, it's best for the group leader to handle this task. Leaders can be trained by whispering an instruction on how to intervene, until the leader gets the hang of it.
- At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material so that students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games but really count.

A student works individually on one part of a task/activity then works with others to combine various parts and complete the task

4. Fish-Bowling technique
One group works at a task while another group observes (eg observe a PBL task, a role-play, a performance) and then comments, responds

5. Role-Play
Provide a situation or individual for a small group to act out. There are pros and cons of role-playing, be wary of the content and what students are asked to do. There are many different forms of role-playing. Can be done online by allocating roles to play to groups or individuals within groups

6. Debate
Prosecutor vs defendant, critic vs defender, affirmative vs negative. Debate an issue online with a partner or as a team

7. Simulations and Games
Provide a 'real' world opportunity for rehearsal in the safety of a group

8. Student-led seminars
Small groups of students (or pairs) are provided with the opportunity to led class (usually tutorials). Also called co-operative learning it aims to develop collaborative skills between students and increase student involvement, and decrease teacher talk time. Can be used as a form of assessment as well

9. A Writing game
A student passes a message to another student who builds upon it, and then passes it on to another student. Like a collage a story emerges

10. Problem based learning (PBL)

Is variously defined, but essentially involves students working on problems or 'scenarios' using an enquiry or question based approach to learning. Students are offered a scenario and then proceed to examine or 'deal' with it via critical thinking and analysis skills. An excellent method in vocational degrees.

11. Action Learning

Action learning is a technique to tackle issues within the workplace by working through them together in a small group of approximately six people. By using the knowledge and skills of a small group combined with probing questions, individuals are able to focus on real issues affecting their work performance and find solutions.

12. Snow ball approach

Group activity that involves concentrating groups of ideas pertaining to the same problem and assigning a theme to them

- ✓ One slip of paper is used per idea generated or possible solutions offered.
- ✓ At least five person conduct a meeting and given the five slips of papers to them, grouped 'like with like'
- ✓ Duplicates can be created if the idea/solution is relevant to more than one group
- ✓ Patterns and relationships in the groups are observed.
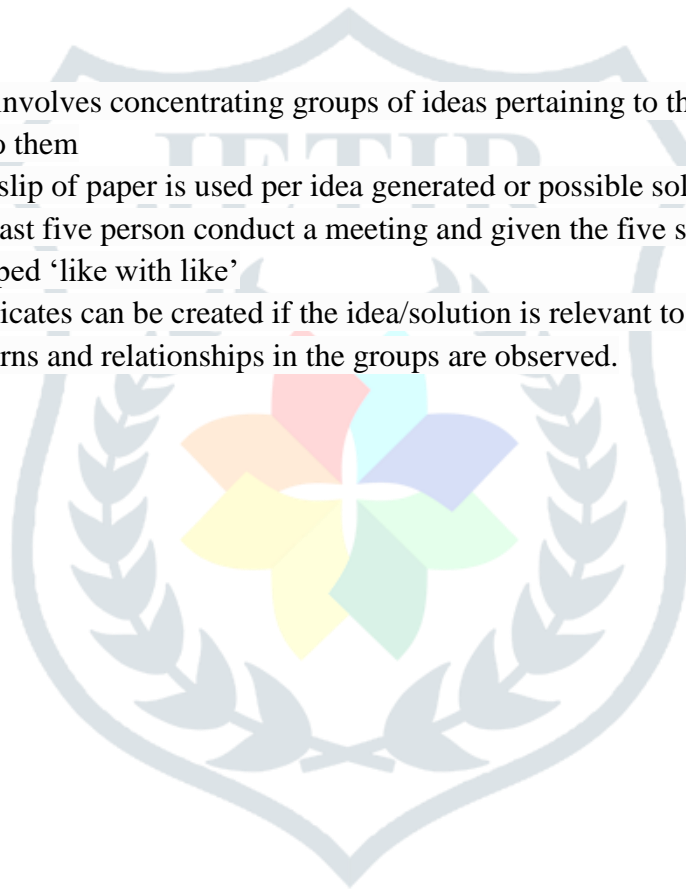
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